

**Testimony of Karen Foley-Schain M.A., M.Ed. LPC,
Executive Director, State of Connecticut Children's Trust Fund
410 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106 (860) 416-8761**

**Prepared for the Government Administration and Elections Committee: Public
Hearing, Monday, March 16, 2009**

Good afternoon. My name is Karen Foley-Schain. I am the Executive Director of the State of Connecticut's Children's Trust Fund.

I am here today to testify against Section 14 of SB 839, An Act Concerning Mergers and Consolidations of Various State Agencies.

For your background, the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund is a state Executive Branch Agency charged with preventing child abuse and neglect and providing resources for families to ensure the positive growth and development of Connecticut's children.

The Trust Fund is responsible for a budget of about \$17 million and a staff of 18.

The staff of the Trust Fund develops, implements, and manages several major state, federal and privately funded initiatives. In addition the staff executes and maintains 90 contracts with more than 100 organizations.

Make no mistake about it: Despite its title, SB 839 neither merges nor consolidates the Trust Fund.

Section 14 of the bill would shut down the Trust Fund, eliminate the staff positions we have, cut some programs and move others to the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Let me tell you why this does not make good sense when it comes to the structure of government, cost savings or delivery of services.

First, moving almost \$15 million, several major initiatives and oversight of 59 contracts from the Trust Fund to DCF is not realistic or practical.

DCF is already overburdened trying to meet its core missions of child protective services, children's mental health, and juvenile justice. It is in no position to handle yet another major initiative.

In addition, the prevention work of the Trust Fund is very different - and even incompatible - from that of DCF. The Trust Fund is in the business of working with families to keep them from ever having a need for involvement with DCF. DCF's prevention mission is by statute - Sec. 17a-3 - focused on children already within its system.

While I cannot support Section 14 of SB 839, in the spirit encouraged by the Governor in her budget address, I am here to ask your support for alternatives now on the table.

At the heart of these alternatives is the idea to merge related prevention programs under the leadership of the Children's Trust Fund - to save money and better serve families and children.

S.B. 878, An Act Concerning the Prevention Role of the Department of Children and Families, is now before the Human Services Committee. This bill would move to the Trust Fund prevention programs now in DCF that are outside of its statutory mandate and aimed primarily at families and children outside of the DCF system.

A more comprehensive effort to reorganize prevention programs is also underway in the Appropriations Sub-Committee of Human Services.

That sub-committee is looking at bringing under the auspices of the Trust Fund \$14 million in prevention programs currently scattered at four state agencies: DPH, SDE, DSS and DCF. Attached you will find a preliminary proposal for this reorganization.

This type of reorganization would maintain valuable programs - while achieving the goal of cost savings. These savings would be accomplished through administrative efficiencies in contracting, training, program development and quality assurance and the elimination of fragmentation and duplication of effort.

Based on a preliminary review of these programs, we have already identified \$1.2 million that can be saved by bringing these prevention programs under the Trust Fund - very close to Governor's proposal that would save just \$1.5 million.

Let me give you just one example:

DCF offers a prevention program called the Early Childhood Consultation Program (ECCP). The budget for ECCP is about \$2.3 million. This program has three layers of administrative costs: DCF contracts with an administrative agency that then sub-contracts with community based agencies - who also charge an administrative fee.

The administrative contract costs \$700,000. The administrative cost within the sub-contracts is \$357,320. As a result the state is paying more than \$1 million dollars - plus the cost of staff at DCF - to administer this \$2.3 million dollar program. This is 42% of the budget for the entire program. The contract for this program is attached to my testimony.

This example highlights two important points:

First, given DCF's need to rely on so much administrative support for ECCP, it is unclear how it could handle the increased responsibilities that would come with the Governor's proposal to transfer Trust Fund programs to that agency.

And second, it demonstrates that if prevention programs were reorganized under the Trust Fund there would be savings. If the Trust Fund were in charge of a program like ECCP, we could administer it without the "middle man" and within available resources. Why? Because the Trust has a well developed infrastructure and a highly trained and experienced staff - all focused exclusively on the administration of prevention programs.

Nothing speaks more clearly to our expertise and efficiency than the fact that the \$700,000 DCF is spending to administer one small \$2.3 million program equals about half of what the Trust Fund spends to administer \$17 million in programs and services.

I urge this committee to reject Section 14 of SB 839 and allow the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund to continue building on its 25 years of spearheading Connecticut's prevention efforts.

I also urge this committee and the legislature to look toward the comprehensive reorganization of prevention programs that is being developed if it must find savings from programs aimed at infants, children and families.

Thank you.